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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASH-DC PRIORITY 1014
INFO RUEHNAV/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 0376
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 0056
RUEHOM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 0422
RUEHJAM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 0488
RUEHIT/AMEMBASSY UGDA 0355
RUEHHR/USELD RIYADH 0347
RUEHRTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0485
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BT
C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 07162

E.O. 12056: DECL: OADR
TAGS: PRL, PINS, LE
SUBJECT: SHI'A POLITICS

1. (C-ENTIRE TEXT)

2. THE UNDISSEMINATED EFFORT IN CONNECTION WITH THE AMAL CONGRESS AND LEADERSHIP ELECTIONS IN APRIL (BEIRUT) 1981 TO EXPLOIT A RECONCILIATION BETWEEN AMAL LEADER (AMIN BARRI) AND VICE PRESIDENT OF THE SHI'A HIGHER ISLAMIC COUNCIL (KHAMRAD HUSNI) SHAMS-AD-DIN HAS LEFT A THREE-WAY SPLIT IN SHI'A NATIONALISM. BARRI, SHAMS-AD-DIN AND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT KAMIL AL-ASSAD HAVE BEEN BREAKING BETWEEN BARRI AND SHAMS-AD-DIN IS NOW NEW. IT DEVELOPED OVER A YEAR AGO. THE AMAL RESTRUCTURING AND ELECTIONS, HOWEVER, COUPLED WITH THE PUBLIC FAILURE OF THE RECONCILIATION EFFORT, HAVE GIVEN THE DIVISION A DEEPER AND MORE PERMANENT APPEARANCE. BARRI AND HIS FOLLOWERS BELIEVE THE POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF SHAMS-AD-DIN AND TAKE THE POSITION THAT THE AMAL MOVEMENT IS BETTER OFF WITHOUT THE EXCESS CLERICAL BAGGAGE REPRESENTED BY SHAMS-AD-DIN AND OTHER SHI'A RELIGIOUS FIGURES. BARRI ADVOCATES, HOWEVER, THAT IT WAS SHAMS-AD-DIN WHO REJECTED THE RECONCILIATION, AND IT APPEARS THAT HE DID SO FROM THE CONVICTION THAT HE IS IN A POSITION TO INCREASE HIS POLITICAL POWER AT BARRI'S EXPENSE.

3. THE TITULAR HEAD OF THE SHI'A HIGHER ISLAMIC COUNCIL CONTINUES TO BE MUZA SADR WHO DISAPPEARED ON A VISIT TO LIBYA IN 1978. THE COUNCIL AS AN INSTITUTION CONSISTS OF ABOUT 40 ELECTED AND APPOINTED MEMBERS, INCLUDING ALL SHI'A PARLIAMENTARY DEPUTIES, AND DOES NOT REFLECT A UNIFIED VIEW. ITS POLITICAL CHARACTER IS DEFINED BY SHAMS-AD-DIN HIMSELF AND SEVERAL OTHER KEY FIGURES, ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT OF WHOM IS SHI'A CLERGY AND FORMER AMAL HEAD (MUSAYN AL-MUSAYN) IN RECENT CONVERSATIONS WITH US.

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Edgum Ethnic - Shi'a/AMAL

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MUSAYN HAS SET FORTH SOME OF THE REASONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S OPPOSITION TO BARRI AND THE CURRENT AMAL LEADERSHIP:

-- AMAL MAINTAINS A MILITARY CHARACTER WHICH IS CONTRARY TO THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT IN LEBANON AND THE VIEWS OF THE SHI'A COMMUNITY.

-- BARRI IS SUBJECT TO INCRIMINATE SYRIAN INFLUENCE.

-- UNDER BARRI, THE AMAL MOVEMENT HAS BECOME TOO REGULARIZED.

-- ALTHOUGH AMAL IS SUPPOSED TO BE SUBJECT TO THE DIRECTION AND GUIDANCE OF THE COUNCIL, BARRI HAS TURNED IT INTO AN INDEPENDENT ORGANIZATION WHICH IS NOT RESPONSIVE TO SHAMS-AD-DIN'S LEADERSHIP.

4. IN TERMS OF LEBANESE POLITICS, MUSAYN DESCRIBES SHAMS-AD-DIN'S POLITICAL OBJECTIVES AS FULLY IN CONCERT WITH THE POLICY OF THE GOVERNMENT. THE TOTAL WITHDRAWAL OF ALL FOREIGN FORCES FROM SHI'A AREAS, A RESTRUCTURING OF THE INTERNAL POLITICAL SYSTEM TO ACCOUNT FOR DEMOGRAPHIC AND OTHER CHANGES (MUSAYN STRESSED, HOWEVER, THAT SHAMS-AD-DIN IS NOT CHALLENGING THE TRADITION OF A MARONITE PRESIDENT) AND AN INCREASED ATTENTION TO SOUTH LEBANON IN TERMS OF ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT AIDS. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, MUSAYN MAINTAINED THAT IT IS INCREASINGLY CLEAR THAT THE DEMAYEL GOVERNMENT HAS AS ITS ULTIMATE GOAL PHASELING OUT OF LEBANON. THE COUNCIL WILL VIGOROUSLY OPPOSE MOVES IN THIS DIRECTION, BUT BY PEACEFUL MEANS.

5. ON THE SUBJECT OF INTERNAL ORIENTATION, MUSAYN SAID THAT RELATIONS BEGAN TO SOUR BETWEEN THE COUNCIL AND THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT AS KHOMEINI BECAME MORE AND MORE POLITICALLY EXTREME. THE COUNCIL MAINTAINED CONTACT WITH BARRI SADR AND OTHERS IN KHOMEINI'S FIRST GOVERNMENT, BUT NOT WITH THE CURRENT RULERS. CONVERSELY, MUSAYN MAINTAINS THAT THE COUNCIL VALUES AND SUPPORTS THE U.S. ROLE IN LEBANON, BELIEVING THAT ONLY THROUGH ACTIVE U.S. EFFORTS CAN A WITHDRAWAL OF FOREIGN FORCES BE ACHIEVED. THE OVERRIDING CONCERN OF THE COUNCIL AND SHAMS-AD-DIN IS WITH THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION OF THE SOUTH, AND MUSAYN, WHO ABSTAINED

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IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY VOTING ON THE ISRAELI-LEBANESE AGREEMENT, SAID HE DID SO AFTER CONSULTATIONS WITH SHAMS-AD-DIN AND BECAUSE OF THE LINKAGE BETWEEN ISRAELI AND SYRIAN WITHDRAWAL, NOT BECAUSE OF THE AGREEMENT PER SE. (COMMENT: IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS, SHAMS-AD-DIN HAS BEEN RELUCTANT TO MEET WITH U.S. ALTHOUGH HIS REASONS MAY HAVE MORE TO DO WITH THREATS TO HIS OWN SECURITY THAN ANY DEEP-SEATED ANTI-AMERICANISM.)

6. KAMIL AL-ASSAD, AL-ASSAD CONTINUES TO ENJOY SUPPORT FROM AMIN DEMAYEL. AS A RESULT OF THIS AND HIS PROMINENT ROLE IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, HE EXERCISES SOME INFLUENCE IN THE SHI'A COMMUNITY. HIS POPULAR BASIS OF SUPPORT REMAINS VERY LIMITED, HOWEVER, THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS WORKING TO HELP AL-ASSAD OUT IN THIS CONNECTION BY SUPPORTING AL-ASSAD ALLIES AND SEEKING TO EXPAND THEIR INFLUENCE IN THE SHI'A COMMUNITY IN ORDER TO PROVIDE AL-ASSAD HIMSELF WITH A MORE SOLID CONSTITUENCY.

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FOR EXAMPLE, WE HEAR THAT A QUIET CAMPAIGN IS
ALREADY UNDERWAY TO SECURE THE ELECTION OF A SHI'A
SHAYKH (ARMED SHAWH) MC-AMIN) THE GADI OF THREE) CLOSE
TO AL-ASSAD TO THE SHI'A HIGHER ISLAMIC COUNCIL NEXT
YEAR WITH THE IDEA THAT HE WILL BE A CHALLENGER
TO SHAMS-AD-DIN. THIS FAR, HOWEVER, THERE ARE FEW
SIGNS THAT AL-ASSAD'S OVERALL POPULARITY IN THE
SHI'A COMMUNITY HAS INCREASED APPRECIABLY. ✓
7. COMMENT: FOR THE MOMENT, THE MAINSTREAM
COMPETITION FOR INFLUENCE IN THE SHI'A COMMUNITY IS
BETWEEN SHAMS-AD-DIN AND BARRI WITH AL-ASSAD A DISTANT
THIRD. WE SUSPECT THAT THE PRIMARY REASON FOR THE
STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE TWO IS COMPETITION FOR POLITICAL
POWER RATHER THAN ANY SERIOUS POLICY DIFFERENCE. NEITHER
APPEARS TO HAVE A CLEAR UPPER HAND AND IT IS POSSIBLE
THAT THEY MAY CONTINUE TO COEXIST ON REASONABLY
EQUAL TERMS FOR SOME TIME. WHILE WATCHING EACH
OTHER, THEY WILL ALSO BE KEEPING ONE EYE ON A
SHARED THREAT IN THE SHI'A COMMUNITY: THE RADICAL
FUNDAMENTALISM REPRESENTED BY MUHAMMAD HUSAYN
FADOLLOU AND OTHERS. PUSH
END OF MESSAGE FILE CONFIDENTIAL

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